

Section 4.1: Establishing Organizational Grant Needs and Priorities

PURPOSE AND POLICY

Before an agency (or any organization) can effectively and efficiently pursue grants, the agency must first establish its needs and priorities, then use this information to pursue those grants that will best help the agency meet those needs. This assessment should also include an agency's capacity for managing the award and the grant-funded program. This will allow the agency to identify and effectively communicate to funders why it needs the funding and how the funding will be used to supplement (not supplant) current programs and services. It will also establish the agency's ability to properly manage the grant.

PROCEDURE

Strategic plan

Agencies that successfully write and receive grants understand this is a targeted approach rather than a broad endeavor; these agencies have clearly defined funding goals tied to documented need. State agencies' grants needs and priorities should be directly linked to its mission, vision and values; the agency's strategic plan provides the details for executing the agency's mission as aligned with the agency's vision and values. The strategic plan should include clearly stated goals and measurable outcomes tied to agency activity (i.e., executing programs and services). As such, an agency's strategy for pursuing grants should be aligned with the agency's strategic plan. The strategic plan should be a living document that has a maximum time range of 3-5 years. It should be reviewed by an agency's executive team annually (along with divisions within an agency) to ensure policies and practices, including grant pursuance, are properly aligned. By doing this, an agency is keeping itself current and ready for all appropriate funding opportunities--and it prevents mission creep.

Programs and services

To accomplish their respective missions, agencies generally seek grant funds to support programs and services to clientele. Clients are sometimes as broad as the general public, other times clients comprise a specific audience, such as children with juvenile diabetes. It is essential that agencies continuously use meaningful metrics to measure program outcomes. For example, simply counting the number of children served by a K-8 literacy campaign does not measure effectiveness of the program. Tracking the reading comprehension test scores (before and after program implementation) for students served by such a campaign will demonstrate the program's effectiveness for improving a student's reading comprehension. It's nearly impossible to find a funding source willing to grant funds for a program that does not have quantifiable measures of progress and success.

Resources

The agency has its strategic plan and mandated services it provides to fulfill its mission, so the agency must determine the resource allocation necessary to successfully meet its mission and prioritize the needs accordingly. This is the nexus of needs and priorities. An Arizona state agency must prepare an annual budget request and submit the budget request to the [Governor's Office of Strategic Budgeting and Planning](#) (OSPB) by Sept. 1 of each year. The agency's request is a baseline budget (based on expenditures from the prior fiscal year) plus any additional needs that the agency has identified. OSPB

develops a statewide budget and delivers it to the state legislature at the beginning of each legislative session in January. The legislature's [Joint Legislative Budget Committee](#) (JLBC) develops its own state budget. The legislature holds a series of appropriations hearings in the Senate and the House. The two branches--executive and legislative--negotiate on a state budget that the governor must sign into law by June 30 of each year. Each state agency must be engaged during the process, answer questions from OSPB and JLBC analysts and provide any documentation necessary to justify the budget request. The agencies should have a good idea of what their final budget will be, barring any last-minute policy changes and/or unexpected "sweeps" of funding. If the agency's final budget reflects a gap between the amount appropriated and the funding requested, the agency has identified a funding need and should pursue grant funding, where appropriate, to fill the need. When doing so, the agency must also consider whether the grant opportunity requires additional staff and whether that staff is authorized for hire.

Reacting to policy and funding priority changes

There will be times when an agency must be reactive to an event, such as a change in state or federal policy. An agency must be flexible and adapt its grant needs and priorities to adjust to a new reality (example: legislative mandates and busted state budgets during the Great Recession). A well-prepared grant staff will be able to adapt quickly and effectively. Efforts that can prepare an agency for changing priorities include:

- Keeping current with state and federal legislative affairs that impact an agency's operations (including the appropriations process)
- Adhering to best fiscal practices with regard to budgeting and accounting
- Continuously measuring an agency's programmatic success
- Maintaining up-to-date policies and procedures
- Joining professional grants associations such as the [National Grants Management Association](#) or the [Grant Professionals Association](#)
- Joining professional associations that serve an agency's area of expertise (i.e., the National Criminal Justice Association for criminal justice agencies) or a specific discipline, such as the Association of Government Accountants for agency finance staff

Signing up for newsletters and email notifications for relevant policy updates (i.e., [state policy](#)) requires that each agency has at least one person signed up to receive email updates from the Arizona General Accounting Office (GAO)).